

News Release Style Guide

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The Bureau typically uses news releases for the timeliest dissemination of new data and principal findings from BLS surveys or studies. Some 170 news releases are issued by the BLS national office each year; those designated by the Office of Management and Budget as Principal Federal Economic Indicators (PFEI) are *The Employment Situation*, *Consumer Price Index*, *Producer Price Indexes*, *U.S. Import and Export Price Indexes*, *Employment Cost Index*, *Productivity and Costs*, and *Real Earnings*. BLS regional offices issue another 600 or so news releases.


The information introduced in news releases often is reported in greater detail in subsequent publications, such as those discussed elsewhere in this guide. Occasionally, a news release will announce, and have attached, a short BLS report. The Bureau also selectively issues news advisories, which are brief statements containing special notices or announcements of upcoming publications or events that may be of particular interest to the media.

Editorial style for the content and format of BLS news releases differs in some respects from that of other BLS publications. The principal difference is that news release style is governed primarily by the Associated Press Stylebook. The AP Stylebook is widely used by the news media, and they strongly prefer that news releases follow its guidelines. Also the U.S. Department of Labor mandates the use of the Stylebook for releases. Style and format decisions for some aspects of BLS news releases are influenced by guidelines from the Department of Labor and by tradition and longstanding practice. Although news releases are intended to be of use to any reader, the news media are the primary intended audience, and style decisions are usually made with that audience in mind. The media are important disseminators of news from BLS and help the Bureau reach a wide and varied audience.

Press office

The OPUBSS press office schedules and coordinates the production of all national office news releases. The press office prepares and maintains a publication calendar, responds to media inquiries, assists the media in obtaining information from BLS programs and support offices, and aids program offices in meetings with the media.

The press office conducts a final review and factcheck of news releases before clearing them for publication. Text and graphic information are reviewed for clarity and accuracy, as well as correct and consistent use of grammar, syntax, spelling, punctuation, and style.

A guide showing the steps and timing of the production process can be found at .

Questions about news release scheduling and about the clearance, production, printing, and distribution processes should be referred to the press office at PressOffice@bls.gov.

Style and structure

BLS news releases usually contain analytical or descriptive *text*, *technical notes*, and *reference tables*, in that order.

Text

Content. The writing style of news releases differs somewhat from that used for other BLS publications. The style is generally less technical and less detailed than that of bulletins, reports, or periodicals. The writing is intended to highlight a subject, rather than be a comprehensive analysis. Sentences generally are short, verbs active, and paragraphs brief. The media are more likely to use, or even quote directly from, releases that are tailored to a journalistic style.

Authors should try to create a narrative or "story" highlighting and accentuating the most salient data or trends; in other words, what may be most newsworthy should get the greatest attention. Simple repetition of figures found in the accompanying tables should be limited. Providing context for data is an important service; comparing one number with others—for example, from a different period (the previous month, quarter, year, etc.)—or comparing two or more related series can provide an analytically useful perspective. Not every data point contained in a release can be described or discussed, but the main measures around which the release is centered should be highlighted.

Lead sentence. A news release should succinctly state the key point of the release in its opening sentence. The mere fact that the Bureau has issued a publication generally is not an appropriate lead; instead, the lead should deal with a finding that is significant or newsworthy. Note that the first paragraph, and usually the first sentence, should include a specific reference to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics as the issuing agency.

Chart use. Charts often are shown on the first page of the release, depending upon space considerations. News releases typically will contain no more than 1 to 3 charts in the text section. Maps also can be used in news releases.

Text table references. Small tables containing special compilations of figures designed to illustrate points of particular interest can be placed within the analytical content section of the news release. Their usage should be limited. These tables should be referenced in the text.

Data sources. News releases should identify the source of the data by BLS program. When a more detailed description is needed, the source information usually should follow the text section in a technical or other explanatory note. Regional releases should point out that the data are from a national BLS survey, unless the regional office alone has produced the data.

Capitalization style. The examples that follow illustrate instances in which certain words are or are not capitalized.

Capitalize full or shortened names of government agencies. Use lowercase for common references:

- U.S. Department of Labor, Labor Department, the Department
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, BLS, the Bureau

The phrase "federal government" does not use initial caps.

Capitalize the name of Census regions and divisions:

- New York State, the State of New York, the state

- Midwest, North Central, western United States

State abbreviations. The following are rules to follow for state abbreviations:

- Spell out the names of the states in text when they appear alone: "Wildfires continued to rage through southern California yesterday."
- Use the AP Stylebook abbreviations for States, not the two-letter postal abbreviations.
- Always spell out: Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Ohio, Maine, and Utah.
- Abbreviate the names of states when they appear in conjunction with the name of a city, town, village, or military base: Needham, Mass., Oxnard Air Force Base, Calif.
- Place one comma between the city and the state name, and another after the state name, except at the end of a sentence or in a dateline: "She traveled from San Diego, Calif., to go to school in Kansas City, Mo. Now, she's thinking of moving to Santa Fe, N.M."
- Use postal code abbreviations when a table is particularly dense.

In the news release text and tables, state abbreviations should be as shown in the following table:

Alabama	Ala.	Indiana	Ind.	Nebraska	Neb.	Rhode Island	R.I.
Arizona	Ariz.	Kansas	Kan.	Nevada	Nev.	South Carolina	S.C.
Arkansas	Ark.	Kentucky	Ky.	New Hampshire	N.H.	South Dakota	S.D.
California	Calif.	Louisiana	La.	New Jersey	N.J.	Tennessee	Tenn.
Colorado	Colo.	Maryland	Md.	New Mexico	N.M.	Texas	Tex.
Connecticut	Conn.	Massachusetts	Mass.	New York	N.Y.	Vermont	Vt.
Delaware	Del.	Michigan	Mich.	North Carolina	N.C.	Virginia	Va.
District of Columbia	D.C.	Minnesota	Minn.	North Dakota	N.D.	Washington	Wash.
Florida	Fla.	Mississippi	Miss.	Oklahoma	Okla.	West Virginia	W.Va.
Georgia	Ga.	Missouri	Mo.	Oregon	Ore.	Wisconsin	Wis.
Illinois	Ill.	Montana	Mont.	Pennsylvania	Pa.	Wyoming	Wyo.

Box notes. Important announcements of changes in data series or in the content or format of the news release generally will be highlighted through the use of a box note. Box notes can be placed on the front page of a release or at the end of the text section, depending upon their sensitivity. Box notes should have a title, be succinct and precise in how they are written, and include contact information for follow-up queries as needed.

Use of names. Releases originating in the national office do not use the names of BLS staff. In regional releases, a common practice is to quote the Regional Commissioner. Such quotations should be used sparingly so that the emphasis stays on data and findings.

Technical notes

Most news releases contain a technical note. Technical notes usually range from 1 to 3 pages and contain basic information about statistical methods, data sources, and estimation techniques, as well as other information to help an interested reader understand the data and how they are gathered and produced. There also may be references to additional information on the BLS website.

Required statement. The Department of Labor requires all of its news releases to include the following statement of access for sensory-impaired individuals: "Information in this release will be made available to individuals with a sensory impairment upon request. Voice phone: (202) 691-5200; Federal Relay Service: (800) 877-8339." BLS currently places this statement in the technical note section of a news release.

Reference tables

News releases include a set of numbered tables after the technical note. (Releases such as *The Employment Situation* that have data from different programs may differentiate the data by using table titles beginning with letters—Table A, Table B, and so on.) These tables augment understanding of the main contents of the release and provide readers with a coherent dataset. The text section cites most or all of the reference tables.

Formatting of text, titles, tables, charts, and other portions of news releases

Text

- Use Times New Roman 12-point font unless otherwise specified.
- Separate sentences with a single space.
- Set page margins to .75 inch on all edges (top, bottom, left, and right).
- Align paragraphs flush left. (That is, do not indent the first line.)
- Do not number the first page. Number subsequent pages in the footer, centered and in the format hyphen+space+numeral+space+hyphen, in 10-point Times New Roman font (Example: - 2 -).
- Include "... the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported today" in the lead.
- Use the masthead graphic provided by the Office of Publications for all news releases; this should not be altered.
- Important subjects or measures shown for the first time can be highlighted with bold text (labor force participation rate). Data are not shown in bold.

Embargo and contact information. The statement regarding embargoed data is located directly below the masthead. This statement is left aligned and written in a bold font, with only the first word capitalized. The statement has no period at the end and is two lines in length. Note that "a.m." is in lowercase.

In non-PFEI news releases, the "for release" statement is one line in length. This statement, too, is left aligned and written in bold, with only the first word capitalized and has no period at the end.

The USDL number is right aligned on the same line as the "for release" statement or embargoed-data statement, formatted as USDL-00-0000, in regular (not bold) font. The last digit of the USDL number should align with the right margin of the page.

The contact information for the program office is located below the embargoed-data statement (after one line of blank space) and is also left aligned in regular (not bold) font. The contact information includes the program office phone number, email address, and homepage. These are all on the same line and separated by space+space+bullet+space+space. The bullet is character code 2022 in the Microsoft Word symbol palette. The homepage address is in black font, is not underlined, and does not include the "http://" or an ending slash. A tab stop of 1.6 inches will align the telephone numbers correctly. The media contact is listed on the next line with the phone number and email address. Here is an example of the proper layout of this information for a PFEI release:

**Transmission of material in this release is embargoed until
8:30 a.m. (EDT) Thursday, July 31, 2008**

USDL-00-0000

Technical information: (202) 691-6199 • NCInfo@bls.gov • www.bls.gov/ect
Media contact: (202) 691-5902 • PressOffice@bls.gov

The Employment Situation release looks slightly different since there are two sets of contact information. Below is an example of the layout for any news release produced by more than one program:

**Transmission of material in this release is embargoed until
8:30 a.m. (EDT) Friday, July 31, 2008**

USDL-00-0000

Technical information:
Household data: (202) 691-6378 • CPSinfo@bls.gov • www.bls.gov/cps
Establishment data: (202) 691-6555 • CESinfo@bls.gov • www.bls.gov/ces

Media contact: (202) 691-5902 • PressOffice@bls.gov

The following is an example of the proper layout for a non-PFEI release:

For release 10:00 a.m. (EDT) Wednesday, July 23, 2008

USDL-00-0000

Technical information: (202) 691-6199 • mlsinfo@bls.gov • www.bls.gov/mls
Media contact: (202) 691-5902 • PressOffice@bls.gov

Title of news release. The title of the release is located below the contact information section, separated by two blank lines (12-point) before and after. It should be written in small caps, centered, bold, using a 14 point Times New Roman font. The period of time covered in the release is separated from the program name by space+en-dash+space. The following is an example:

PRODUCER PRICE INDEXES – JUNE 2008

The *Productivity and Costs* news release title should be split into two lines, as follows:

PRODUCTIVITY AND COSTS FIRST QUARTER 2009, PRELIMINARY

Section headings. Headings for sections in the text of the release are lower case, left-aligned, and bold. They are not underlined or followed by a colon.

Next release date. The date for the next release in the series, if known, should be the last statement in the text section of the release. It should be separated from the text by a blank line and a one-inch horizontal rule (1" tab with underline). The text should be left-aligned and bold and read, for example:

The Employment Cost Index for September 2008 is scheduled to be released on Friday, October 31, 2009 at 8:30 a.m. (EDT).

For non-PFEIs, where the next release date is not known (as is true for many of the annual releases), this line can be omitted.

Charts

The purpose of charts is to communicate information in a visual way. If a chart is not readily understandable (because it is too small, too cluttered, poorly labeled, etc.) then its usefulness is sharply curtailed and it may be a candidate for omission.

Charts should be large enough to be legible. If a chart is more than approximately 80% of the page width (factoring in margins) it should be displayed left aligned. If narrower, it should be centered.

Periodicity of charts. Charts illustrating one year of data should show thirteen months (that is, May 2008 – May 2009); charts illustrating two years of data should show 25 months; etc. In special cases, longer data series can begin with the first period of the first year displayed and end with the most recent period measured. If multiple charts are included in the same news release, all charts should use the same time span.

Text of charts.

- Charts should use Arial or Helvetica typeface with an 8-point or 10-point font for all text.
- Charts should have titles, identified by sequential numbers (that is, "Chart 1", "Chart 2", etc.) even if there is only one chart in the release. The identifier is terminated with a period and single space. Charts are numbered sequentially independent of tables.
- Titles are justified to the left edge of the chart, bold, and have only the first word (and program name or formal category name, if relevant) capitalized. Titles "belong" to the table and should use the same typeface as the rest of the chart. Titles may be up to two lines long.

Color and settings of charts.

Bar Charts:

- Bars should have a series overlap of 0% and a gap width of 50%.
- Bars should be a solid fill with 0% transparency.
- Bar colors should be one of three options: Dark blue (Red 0, Green 0, Blue 255), Light blue (Red 153, Green 204, Blue 255), or Plum (Red 153, Green 51, Blue 102).
- Border color is a black, solid line with 0% transparency.
- Border style is a solid line (0.25 pt width) with a flat cap type and round join type.
- No shadow or 3-D formats.

Line Charts:

- Line should have solid fill with 0% transparency.
- Line colors should be the same as mentioned in the bar chart section above.
- Line style is 2pt width, solid line, round cap type, round join type, no arrows, and NO smoothed line box.
- No shadow or 3-D formats.

See additional chart specifications at .

Reference tables

As noted previously, most BLS news releases contain reference tables at the back of the release. Table titles, column formats, headers, indentation, notes and other table elements usually follow the long-established formats as shown in the Tables chapter elsewhere in this style guide. Some aspects of reference table formatting have varied across news releases due to specific or atypical program needs relating to production systems and other considerations. With the development and gradual implementation in recent years of a standardized formatting production system, news release tables now are trending towards greater uniformity (the *Producer Price Index* and *U.S. Import and Export Price Index* releases are examples of news releases that have adopted the new system). The press office can respond to queries about reference table formats, as needed.

Additional news release-related materials

Abstracts and headlines

Along with a complete copy of the news release, program offices are asked to submit an abstract and a headline. Currently, the abstract is sent out through the news release email subscription service and is shown on the BLS homepage. Abstracts may also be used in RSS feeds (a syndication service to which other websites can subscribe) and as scripts for podcasts. The abstract should contain highlights or the lead from the news release. (For further information on abstracts, see [REDACTED].)

Program offices should also submit to the press office a headline with a maximum of 90 characters (including spaces). The headline will be displayed prominently on the BLS website, including on the main BLS homepage, and posted on the BLS Twitter account. (For additional information, see [REDACTED].)

Supplemental materials

Concurrent with the issuance of a news release, program offices often choose to post on the BLS website additional supporting materials, such as technical notices, data packages, or specially-prepared extra files. These items should be submitted through the BLS Web Review process for review and posting.

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